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RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002062

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA;

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: TANDJA TALKS AFTER YAR'ADUA'S INTERVENTION

REF: A. NIAMEY 0899

[1](#)B. NIAMEY 0900

[1](#)C. WAUTLET-ARENDT E-MAIL OF 11/16

Classified By: Acting DCM James P. McAnulty
for reasons in Sections 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Delegations representing Niger's ruling and opposition parties met separately with Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) appointed mediator Abdulsalami Abubakar in Abuja during the week of November 9. President Mamadou Tandja decided to send his delegation only after Nigerian President Umaru Yar'Adua temporarily closed the border to commercial traffic, according to an ECOWAS Parliament insider, but such talks lasted only one day. Tandja's delegation stormed out after Abubakar insisted on restoration of the country's previous constitution. In contrast, Niger's opposition coalition expressed appreciation that the talks even occurred. ECOWAS will likely impose a December 22 deadline for Tandja to act on ECOWAS demands. Nigeria continued to apply pressure on Tandja by restricting the flow of goods across the border with Niger. END SUMMARY.

ABUBAKAR MEETS TANDJA DELEGATION IN ABUJA

[1](#)2. (U) ECOWAS-appointed mediator Abdulsalami Abubakar (Nigeria's former military head of state from June 9, 1998, to May 29, 1999, during the transition to democracy) opened the ECOWAS Consultative Meeting on the Niger constitutional crisis by meeting in Abuja with a delegation from Niger's Tandja-led government on November 9. In opening comments before the closed-door session, Abubakar expressed hope that the sessions would resolve the Niger crisis and allow both the government and opposition to focus on Niger's future economic development, rather than continued political power jockeying. Abubakar, who was the only speaker during the opening session, thanked Niger President Tandja for accepting ECOWAS-led mediation efforts.

TANDJA DELEGATION QUILTS ABUJA AFTER FIRST DAY

13. (C) ECOWAS Parliament Protocol Officer Koffi Abalo of Togo informed PolMilOff on November 13 that negotiations with Niger President Tandja's 22-member delegation -- led by Prime Minister Seyni Oumalou and scheduled for two days -- ended abruptly on the first day, November 9. Tandja's delegation stormed out after Abubakar insisted that President Tandja "must restore the previous constitution" before ECOWAS lifted any sanctions. Abubakar also demanded that Tandja not install members of the new national assembly or swear in the new speaker in a ceremony scheduled on November 14. (COMMENT: Per Ref A, Tandja convened the national assembly, but it has not yet elected a new speaker. END COMMENT.)

14. (C) Abalo remarked to PolMilOff that Tandja was using the new appointment of Niger's Speaker as a means to oust ECOWAS Parliament Speaker Mahamane Ousmane, who previously served as Niger's Speaker before Tandja dissolved the national assembly last May. The ECOWAS parliament is in a four-year transition period (until the end of 2010) during which most members gained appointment by national assemblies, rather than via direct suffrage. Abalo remarked that the ECOWAS Parliament employed a rotating speakership, which Niger presently occupied. Abalo stated that ECOWAS planned to retain Ousmane as Speaker until the end of 2010, when his tenure would have otherwise expired. Abalo added that ECOWAS would not recognize Tandja's new government and, therefore, would not seat Niger's new Speaker of the National Assembly in Ousmane's place.

TANDJA UNCOOPERATIVE FROM OUTSET

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15. (C) Abubakar had initially sent a letter to Tandja on November 3 requesting that he send a twelve-member delegation to Abuja for mediation. However, a Swiss diplomat told PolMilOff that Tandja initially refused, insisting that the talks take place in Niamey, rather than Abuja. Tandja sent Abubakar a defiant letter November 5 stating that he would send a delegation to Abuja for one day, November 8, to meet Abubakar, but that Abubakar would have to travel to Niamey to negotiate. Tandja cited Article 45 of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to argue that any negotiations would have to occur on Niger territory because the dialogues involved domestic politics. (COMMENT: While Article 45 addresses permissible sanctions against an ECOWAS-member nation, it mentions nothing about the venue of meetings. Embassy forwarded copies of both letters to the Department via Ref C. END COMMENT.)

YAR'ADUA APPLIES PRESSURE

16. (C) The Swiss diplomat told PolMilOff November 13 that Nigerian President Yar'Adua personally ordered Nigerian Customs Service officials to block exports of various goods from Nigeria to Niger, beginning November 6, as a direct response to Tandja's November 5 letter. ECOWAS President Dr. Mohamed Chambas told the Swiss diplomat that he had not requested Nigeria's cross-border trade blockade, but that he appreciated it "immensely" because it placed additional pressure on Tandja. Abalo separately confirmed the blockade and added that Yar'Adua had told Tandja that goods represented just the first step in the blockade if he did not agree to talk with Abubakar. Yar'Adua had promised to cut off electricity transmission to Niger as "the next phase." (N.B.: Niger receives the majority of its electricity supply from Nigeria -- as much as 87 percent, according to a Canadian diplomat. END NOTE.)

17. (C) While the GON publicly denied closing the border to Niger, Abalo described such denials as "just diplomacy." A

Canadian diplomat with contacts on the border in Yobe and Borno States told PolMiloff that Customs officials blocked "numerous trucks" transporting commercial goods to Niger November 6 to 7. Abalo stated that Yar'Adua lifted the blockade only when Tandja agreed to come to Abuja, but has since re-implemented it after the Niger government delegation quit negotiating with Abubakar. Abalo cited several canceled Arik Air flights as one example. He also confirmed that Nigerian Customs officials had begun restricting exports again. In contrast, a British diplomat told PolMiloff that the Sultan of Sokoto had informed him that Sokoto was not restricting any goods.

OPPOSITION DEPARTS FROM ABUJA PLEASED

18. (C) Members of the Niger opposition, comprising a coalition of political parties, civil society groups, and labor unions called Coordination of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (CFDR), met with Abubakar November 11 to 13. The 40-person delegation, which included main opposition party leader Mahamadou Issoufou of the Niger Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), former Niger prime minister Hama Amadou, and Niger's former head of state and current ECOWAS Parliament Speaker Ousmane, said they were "very happy" with the progress of Abubakar's negotiations, according to Abalo, who attended these meetings. Ousmane, who came to the Embassy November 13 to apply for a visa en route to the United Nations in New York, confirmed to PolMilOff separately that he was pleased with the discussions with Abubakar. He expressed hope that President Tandja would eventually relent to international pressure, but expressed frustration with lack of progress so far.

DECEMBER 22 DEADLINE

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19. (C) Abalo remarked that ECOWAS would impose a December 22 deadline for President Tandja to restore the previous constitution. Abubakar and opposition leaders have discussed possible consequences, including increased pressure through continued Nigerian blockades on goods to Niger. Abalo opined that a civil war would result if Tandja refused to negotiate. Separately, a Canadian diplomat predicted to PolMilOff that Niger could last only two weeks under a full blockade before Tandja's government would fall, but expressed doubt that a full blockade would actually occur.
SANDERS